

# NEWS

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
Office of Communications News Room 460-A  
Washington, DC 20250-1300  
Internet: News @usda.gov Phone: 202-720-9035  
World Wide Web Home Page: <http://www.usda.gov>

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Release No. 0353.97

Jim Petterson (202) 720-4623  
Wayne Baggett (202) 720-2032

## **GLICKMAN KICKS OFF SIGN-UP PERIOD FOR CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM**

WASHINGTON, Oct. 14, 1997--Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman today announced the opening of the 16th sign-up period for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Farmers and ranchers for the next five weeks will be able to apply to enroll environmentally sensitive lands in the CRP. The sign-up period closes on Friday, November 14.

"I want to encourage all landowners to consider enrolling their eligible environmentally-sensitive land in this program," Glickman said. "I strongly urge farmers and ranchers to get all the facts about how the CRP can be applied across their entire landscape. They have many options to consider because so many different types of land are eligible for CRP enrollment, from cropped wetlands, highly erodible land, and edges of cropped fields to strips of land next to streams and rivers, field wind breaks and more."

The program was modified recently to emphasize benefits to the environment in reducing soil erosion, water and air pollution, and enhancing wildlife habitat. The first sign-up under the new rules was held in March of this year.

The CRP is a voluntary program under which landowners and operators enter into contracts with USDA to place highly erodible and other environmentally-sensitive cropland into the program for 10-15 years. In exchange, landowners receive annual rental payments for the land and cost-share assistance for establishing conservation practices.

"The last sign-up was very successful," said Glickman. "And I expect great results this time as well. USDA field employees are working hard to inform producers about this important opportunity."

Glickman said all land that is enrolled in the program must compete for acceptance based on an Environmental Benefits Index (EBI) that ensures fair and equal consideration for all types of land. The EBI evaluates the offers based on seven factors: soil erosion; wildlife habitat; water quality; air quality; enduring benefits; priority areas; and cost.

"Applicants should be aware that CRP is a highly competitive program and that the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI) system was changed for this sign-up to address concerns arising from the 15th sign-up and to better protect the nation's natural resource base," Glickman said. "I encourage applicants to consult with USDA experts locally on steps they can take to maximize EBI points. Landowners who do this have a higher likelihood that their acreage will be accepted."

Approximately 27.8 million acres are under CRP contracts as of October 1, 1997. Just over 4.8 million acres are under contracts that expire next year on September 30. USDA is authorized to maintain enrollment of up to 36.4 million acres.

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The CRP is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency (FSA), in cooperation with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, State forestry agencies, and local soil and water conservation districts.

Further information is available at local FSA and NRCS offices, which are listed in telephone books under "United States Government, U.S. Department of Agriculture."

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